

(i) The benefits as they appear in the *Compendium of Determinations*

These are explained in two sets of four:

(a) The first set of four

1) *You will obtain vast merit*

The **Immortal Drumbeat Dharani** says:

*The Bhagavan Buddha is inconceivable
The sublime teaching is also inconceivable
The noble community is inconceivable
For those having faith in the inconceivable
The fruition is also inconceivable*

The qualities of the Three Jewels are actually totally beyond our ordinary perception which is why the extent of the karmic result of having faith and of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is also totally beyond our ordinary perception.

Furthermore, Aryasura says in his ***Compendium of the Perfections (Paramita-Samasa)***

*If the merit of having taken refuge had form
The three thousand-fold universe would be too small to hold it
How would one be able to measure with one hand
The treasures of the water of the great ocean?*

By taking refuge we are directing the mind toward attaining happiness in future lives, liberation, or enlightenment; we create the causes for achieving *all* our goals, mundane or supramundane. Therefore, entrusting ourselves to the Three Jewels generates immeasurable quantities of positive energy which exceeds by far the positive energy we generate when engaging in ordinary positive actions.

2) *You will obtain both joy and supreme joy*

Here Lama Tsongkhapa gives a quote from the ***Collection of Indicative Verses***, a text containing different statements of advice given by the Buddha on various occasions that were later compiled in verse form by one of the Arhats.

*Those, who recalling the Buddha
During the day and at night,
Take refuge in him,
Gain the advantage of being human.*

Even though this verse explicitly mentions the Buddha, it can be equally applied to the Dharma, and the Sangha. We should continuously recollect our understanding of the Three Jewels. What does it mean to be a Buddha and Sangha? What does the Dharma refer to? What are the functions of the Three Jewels? What are their nature, purpose and benefit? What do they mean to us? Do we feel confident that we can attain our own resultant Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha?

By making it a habit to reflect daily upon the Three Jewels we should make our precious human existence meaningful and take refuge. This will result in attaining both ordinary and supreme joy and happiness.

3) *You will obtain concentration (and)*

4) *You will obtain purity*

Taking refuge also results in attaining concentration and purity, with purity referring to wisdom. Thus, the third and fourth benefits of taking refuge are attaining the union of calm abiding and special insight which are essential for proceeding on the path to enlightenment.

(b) The second set of four

1) *You will have great protection*

This will be explained later.

- 2) *You will reduce, extinguish, and totally annihilate all obstructions derived from incorrect beliefs*
Since beginningless time we have relied upon faulty systems, harmful teachers, and erroneous teachings and as a result accumulated numerous negativities of body, speech, and mind, which can now create serious obstacles to our Dharma practice. These negative imprints may prevent us from gaining a correct understanding of the Dharma, cause obstructive doubt to arise in our mental continuum, hinder us from subduing our mind, and so forth.
However, through taking refuge we can gradually reduce and eventually totally eradicate these obstructions so that we face less and less obstacles to our spiritual development.
- 3) *You are counted among excellent persons, who genuinely accomplish the sublime*
Through taking refuge we will be counted as excellent persons whose actions of body, speech, and mind gradually become pure, who live their lives according to the their devotion in the Buddha, practice the Dharma, and receive their inspiration from the Sangha.
- 4) *You delight and receive the approval of your teachers and spiritual companions, and of the celestial beings (deities) who take joy in the teaching*
When we take refuge and practice according to our refuge precepts, the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and our spiritual teachers will be greatly delighted and rejoice.
Furthermore, certain celestial beings of the desire realm who have faith and take joy in the Buddha Dharma will also be very pleased. These celestial beings use their power to protect the teachings and Buddhist practitioners. They have clairvoyant powers and are able to read the minds of those who reside on spiritual levels equal to or lower than themselves. When they perceive someone sincerely taking refuge and practising properly it makes them very happy and they greatly rejoice. Therefore, as a result of our taking refuge they accumulate merit, which in turn creates merit for us because our actions led them to increase their merit.

(ii) The benefits as they appear in the special oral instructions

The benefits of taking refuge according to the tradition of the special oral instructions are eightfold. They are also enumerated at the end of Panchen Sonam Drakpa's presentation of the objects of refuge in his *General Meaning* (Handout 15), though they slightly differ in order and number.

1. You are included among Buddhists

Since taking refuge is the gateway to Buddhist practice, when we take refuge from the depth of our heart and do not forsake that refuge we become Buddhist. In general, there are different ways to define a Buddhist. According to one tradition a Buddhist is someone who believes in the four seals. However, Lama Tsongkhapa explains that according to the tradition of Atisha and his teacher, the Indian Pandit Santipa, a Buddhist is defined as someone who has great faith in the Three Jewels.

2. You become worthy to uphold all vows

Taking refuge is the basis for all Buddhist vows. Without such refuge one cannot take the Pratimoksha, Bodhisattva or Tantric vows. Therefore, taking refuge is part of the ritual of taking vows and precedes the part of the ritual when the vows are actually taken.

Vasubhandu says in his *Autocommentary on the Abhidharma*:

Those who take refuge enter the door leading to the taking of vows.

Also, Chandrakirti says in his *Seventy Verses on Refuge*:

O lay practitioners, taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the basis for the eight vows.

3. You reduce and eliminate previously accumulated karmic obstructions

As explained before, taking refuge creates very powerful positive imprints that reduce the force of negative imprints or possibly purify them.

Shantideva says in the *Compendium of Trainings (Siksa-samuccaya)*:

Here you should take the edifying tale of the pig as an example.

